LIGHT ETERNAL
The Choral Music of Morten Lauridsen
Chamber Choir of Europe
Nicol Matt
Deutsche Grammophon

LIGHT ETERNAL

The Choral Music of Morten Lauridsen (*1943)

Lux aeterna (1997)

01 1. Introitus 7:53
02 2. In te, Domine, speravi 4:57
03 3. O nata lux 4:12
04 4. Veni, Sancte Spiritus 2:28
05 5. Agnus Dei – Lux aeterna 12:15

Les Chansons des Roses (1993)
Texts: Rainer Maria Rilke

06 1. En une seule fleur 2:41
07 5. Dirait-on 5:13

08 **Ov'è, lass', il bel viso?** (1987) 3:42
No. 1 from *Madrigali: Six "Fire Songs" on Italian Renaissance Poems*

09 **Se per havervi, oime** (1987) 3:43
No. 6 from *Madrigali: Six "Fire Songs" on Italian Renaissance Poems*

10 **Prayer** (2013, World Premiere Recording)..... 5:07
Text: Dana Gioia

11 **Ya eres mía** (2016, World Premiere Recording) 6:28
Text: Pablo Neruda

Nocturnes (2005/2008)

12 1. Sa nuit d'été 3:29
Text: Rainer Maria Rilke

13 2. Soneto de la Noche 6:40
Text: Pablo Neruda

14 3. Sure on This Shining Night 5:01
Text: James Agee

15 4. Epilogue: Voici le soir 2:31
Text: Rainer Maria Rilke

16 **O Magnum Mysterium** (1994) 6:48

17 **Where Have the Actors Gone** (1977)..... 5:25

For complete lyrics please go to www.klassikakzente.de

Chamber Choir of Europe · Nicol Matt conductor
I Virtuosi Italiani [01–05]
Morten Lauridsen piano [07/09/11/13/14/17]

Chamber Choir of Europe

Soprano
Markella Tsouva (Greece)
Sílvia Sabater Martínez (Spain)
Elizabeth Parsons (UK)
Ilona Popova (Latvia)
Ingvill Espedal (Norway)
Estelle Solem (France)

Alto
Beate Feuerstein-Weber (Germany)
Lea Martensmeier (Germany)
Ramona Mira Castillo Osuna (Italy/Romania)
Teele Utt (Estonia)
Rita Tavares (Portugal)
Sonja Rullmann (Germany)

Tenor
Malcolm Cooper (USA)
Diederik Rooker (Netherlands)
Daniel Arnaldos (Spain)
André Cruz (Portugal)
Pierre Girod (France)
Moshe Haas (Israel)

Bass
Valentin Petrovici (Romania)
Ken Gould (Netherlands/USA)
Matúš Mazár (Slovakia)
Marcus Friedrich (Germany)
Nemanja Miličević (Serbia)
Raphael Kuhn (Germany)

ILLUMINING THROUGH SOUND

Morten Lauridsen's Choral Music

Writing music that radiates a personal voice is the holy grail for many composers. Morten Lauridsen has found his by tapping into the root power of the human voice itself, creating an aesthetic that is immediate while at the same time transportive and transcendent. This combination makes him a rare instance of a mystic in American music, to borrow the choral scholar Nick Strimple's apt characterization. And it is the secret behind the immense magnetism that attracts listeners and performers to Lauridsen.

Even a first encounter with *Lux aeterna*, the work that lends this album its title, readily conveys the special qualities that set Lauridsen apart: the meditative spaces he establishes and sustains over long stretches; the clarity with which he writes for the singing voice; above all, the warmth and emotional directness of his musical ideas, which the composer weaves together with concealed but admirable craft, making them sound inevitable.

Lux aeterna and the album's concluding work (*O Magnum Mysterium*) were pivotal for Lauridsen's development of his mature style and voice. They also made a profound impact on the international choral scene within an astonishingly brief span, leading to thousands of performances and many imitators. But it took time for this native of the Pacific Northwest to arrive there. Nearly all of the works on this album date from within the past quarter-century. A perfectionist who works painstakingly to hone his scores to the utmost degree of transparency, entirely free of gratuitous gestures, Lauridsen spent decades trying out other idioms while simultaneously pursuing an academic career teaching composition at the University of Southern California's Thornton School of Music in Los Angeles.

Lauridsen was already at university when he decided to devote his life to composition. A prolonged encounter with nature during a summer job as a firefighter in a national park left him with an indelible longing to strive to capture in music the "beauty beyond description" he had experienced that summer. So Lauridsen, even before he had a single composition to his credit, talked his way into the composition department of Halsey Stevens, an

eminent Bartók scholar and former student of Ernest Bloch. Lauridsen's other mentors included Harold Owen, Robert Linn, and Ingolf Dahl.

From these influences, Lauridsen absorbed some traits of neoclassicism but above all a sense of discipline toward the craft of composing. Later, his close association with the Los Angeles Master Chorale led to a residency there in the 1990s, during which he composed *Lux aeterna*. The Master Chorale's director at the time, Paul Salamunovich, and the artistry of these singers were formative inspirations. Lauridsen benefitted from Salamunovich's deep knowledge of Gregorian and Renaissance traditions, internalizing an affinity for the long melodic lines that are integral to his mature style.

Lux aeterna (premiered in 1997) alludes to the traditional Mass for the Dead, but the composer put together his own selection of Latin texts for this meditation on the final passage. "Light Eternal," the title's meaning, is the key to Lauridsen's conception, underpinned by a symmetrical arch structure that centers on the serenely intimate a cappella movement "O nata lux." Light-related imagery binds all five movements together, serving, in Lauridsen's words, as "a universal symbol of hope, reassurance, goodness, and illumination at all levels."

Lauridsen set the stage for his breakthrough works of the 1990s with his 1993 song cycle *Les Chansons des Roses* to five French poems from Rainer Maria Rilke's *œuvre*. We hear the first and last songs of this cycle, which illustrates Lauridsen's sensuous response to poetry and a lighter sense of joy particularly in the concluding "Dirait-on."

Poetry indeed is central to Lauridsen's creative life. It is no coincidence that he gravitated toward choral music and art song, for his sensitivity to word setting, on every level, is intimately bound up with his musical inspiration. This is especially evident in the *Madrigali: Six "Fire Songs" on Italian Renaissance Poems* from 1987, an exquisite cycle informed by the elegance of Monteverdi's word-painting yet entirely in Lauridsen's voice. He regards "Se per havervi, oime," the sixth song, as his favorite of the cycle. Here, the fact that love will remain unrequited, a condition signified by a unifying "fire chord" heard in all six songs, is finally accepted as the state of things.

Love is the varied theme of the next two songs as well, both world premiere recordings. In *Prayer* (2013), to a text by the American poet Dana Gioia – a close friend of the composer – parents mourn the death of a child, but it is their undying love that the music underscores. The Chilean master

poet Pablo Neruda's sonnet *Ya eres mía*, composed in 2016 and the most recent work on this album, allows Lauridsen to fathom the erotic facet of mysticism.

Both Neruda and Rilke, along with the American writer James Agee, provided the poems for *Nocturnes* (2005/2008). Lauridsen frequently conceives his works as multi-movement cycles that involve interlacing references between components of the whole – all in service of a unifying theme, as, here, the associations awakened by night.

As in the *Madrigali*, Lauridsen incorporates into his recognizable voice allusions that reflect something of each specific context – the light Parisian jazz of the 1920s (the framing Rilke poems), an a cappella folk melody (Neruda), and even a ballad from the American musical theater (Agee), an idiom close to the composer's heart that has also inspired a number of his choral songs.

O Magnum Mysterium (1994) is a motet about a miracle – the manifestation of transcendent reality within the lowliest, most unlikely of circumstances. Moved by the prayer's expression of "profound inner joy," Lauridsen here creates a piece encapsulating the most mystical aspects of his music, whose purpose is "to illumine through sound." *Thomas May*

Conductor: Nicol Matt, www.nicolmatt.com
Orchestra: I Virtuosi Italiani, www.ivirtuosiitaliani.eu
Choir: Chamber Choir of Europe, www.chamber-choir-of-europe.eu

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Shining Night: A Portrait of Composer Morten Lauridsen is an award-winning documentary film about the National Medal of Arts recipient, named an “American Choral Master” by the National Endowment for the Arts. Lauridsen, who spends summers on a remote island in the Pacific Northwest and whom musicologist Nick Strimple distinguishes as “the only American composer in history who can be called a mystic”, has achieved the status of the most frequently performed modern choral composer. The film, produced by Michael Stillwater and Doris Laesser Stillwater, reveals the composer through the lens of his love for the natural world together with his passion for music and poetry, interwoven with commentaries from composers, singers, friends, and conductors, including Nicol Matt.
More info: www.shiningnightfilm.net

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